

## Message Text

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14  
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00

DHA-02 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 EB-07 PRS-01 USIA-06

/079 W

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R 200523Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1682

INFO AMCONSUL MONTREAL

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 WELLINGTON 2677

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, NZ

SUBJECT: SPORT AND POLITICS: NEW ZEALAND CONTACTS WITH SOUTH AFRICA  
JEOPARDIZE ITS INTERNATIONAL STANDING IN SPORTS

SUMMARY: PROBLEMS GROWING OUT OF NEW ZEALAND'S SPORTS  
TIES WITH SOUTH AFRICA, INCLUDING THE NOW AVERTED  
POSSIBILITY THAT NEW ZEALAND COULD HAVE BEEN BARRED  
FROM PARTICIPATION IN THE OLYMPIC GAMES AT MONTREAL, ARE  
THE SUBJECT OF INTENSE PUBLIC INTEREST IN THIS COUNTRY.  
SPORTS CONTACTS WITH SOUTH AFRICA WERE A POLITICAL ISSUE  
IN THE 1972 AND 1975 GENERAL ELECTIONS AND REMAIN SO TODAY  
WITH BOTH GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION SEEKING POLITICAL  
ADVANTAGE OUT OF SPORT IN A SPORTS MAD LAND. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A COUNTRY WHERE AMATEUR RUGBY  
(RUGBY UNION) IS KING, THE QUESTION OF WHETHER THE SOUTH  
AFRICAN SPRINGBOKS RUGBY TEAM WOULD PLAY AGAINST NEW  
ZEALAND'S ALL BLACKS IN 1972 WAS A HOT POLITICAL ISSUE  
IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS. THE THEN LEADER OF THE  
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OPPOSITION LABOUR PARTY, NORMAN KIRK, PROMISED THAT IF

HE BECAME PRIME MINISTER HE WOULD NOT INTERFERE WITH A PLANNED SPRINGBOKS TOUR OF NEW ZEALAND. THIS WAS DESPITE THE LABOUR PARTY'S OUTSPOKEN OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE THEN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT ALSO FERVENTLY SUPPORTED THE SPRINGBOKS TOUR WHICH WOULD HAVE PITTED THE TWO TITANS OF THE AMATEUR RUGBY WORLD, THE SPRINGBOKS AND THE ALL BLAKS (THE COLOR OF THEIR UNIFORMS) IN A CONTEST FOR WORLD SUPREMACY. BUT WHEN LABOUR WON THE ELECTION AND KIRK BECAME PRIME MINISTER, HE STOPPED THE TOUR UNDER THREAT FROM A SMALL BUT VOCIFEROUS OPPOSITION THAT VIOLENT EXCEPTION WOULD BE TAKEN.

2. KIRK'S FAILURE TO LIVE UP TO HIS ELECTORAL PROMISE BROUGHT FORTH OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS BITTER NATIONAL PARTY ATTACKS ON THE OVERALL CREDIBILITY OF THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT. A LARGE SIMULATED THERMOMETER APPEARED ON A TALL BUILDING IN WELLINGTON SHOWING LABOUR PARTY CREDIBILITY CONSTANTLY DROPPING. THUS, THE MATTER OF WHETHER TWO RUGBY TEAMS COULD PLAY EACH OTHER BECAME HIGHLY POLITICIZED, WITH THE RULING LABOUR PARTY PORTRAYING ITS OPPOSITION TO RUGBY CONTESTS WITH SOUTH AFRICA AS EVIDENCE OF ITS HUMANITARIAN CONCERN OVER RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WHILE THE NATIONAL PARTY COUCHED ITS SUPPORT FOR THE RUGBY GAMES AS SUPPORT FOR LESS GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE IN EVERYDAY HUMAN AFFAIRS AND, INDIRECTLY, AS SUPPORT FOR THE GOOD OLD-FASHIONED NEW ZEALAND WAY OF LIFE. IN LAST YEAR'S GENERAL ELECTIONS THE SPORTS CONTROVERSY, ACCORDING TO SOME OBSERVERS, WAS THE BIGGEST SINGLE ELECTION ISSUE WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE ECONOMY. THE RESULTS WERE THAT THE NATIONAL PARTY WON THE ELECTION OVERWHELMINGLY, ROBERT MULDOON BECAME THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE ALL BLACK RUGBY TEAM IS PRESENTLY COMPETING IN SOUTH AFRICA.

3. BUT A COMBINATION OF CIRCUMSTANCES, SOME OF THEM UNFORESEEN, HAS CREATED TROUBLING CONSEQUENCES FOR THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE MOST IMPORTANT IS THAT THE SOWETO RIOTS HIGHLIGHTED THE REPRESSIVE RACIAL POLICIES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT JUST AS THE ALL BLACK TOUR WAS BEGINNING. THIS JUXTAPOSITION OF EVENTS WAS

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SUBJECT TO BEING INTERPRETED, AS INDEED IT WAS SO READ BY SOME OF THE GOVERNMENT'S OPPONENTS, AS MEANING THAT NEW ZEALAND'S OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID WAS LIP SERVICE ONLY. THE SECOND CIRCUMSTANCE IS THAT FFILBERT BAYI OF TANZANIA AND JOHN WALKER OF NEW ZEALAND ARE THE BEST MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNERS IN THE WORLD, WITH THEIR IMPENDING CLASH IN THE GLAMOUR MILE RACE AT THE MONTREAL OLYMPICS THE MOST KEENLY ANTICIPATED EVENT IN

NEW ZEALAND. THUS, THE WITHDRAWAL OF TANZANIA AND CANCELLATION OF THE BAYI-WALKER RACE AT MONTREAL HAS HAD MAXIMUM IMPACT IN NEW ZEALAND. THE FEAR THAT NEW ZEALAND ITSELF MIGHT BE BARRED FROM THE GAMES HAS NOW BEEN OVERCOME, BUT THE CONTINUED WITHDRAWAL OF SEVERAL OTHER AFRICAN AND ARAB COUNTRIES HAS HAD A SOBERING INFLUENCE ON NEW ZEALAND OPINION.

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4. MEANWHILE THE OPPOSITION HAS CHARGED THE GOVERNMENT WITH UNCONCERN OVERBLACK AFRICAN SENSIBILITIES AND MORAL CALLOUSNESS RESPECTING THE APARTHEID SYSTEM IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE FACT IS THAT THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT HAS NO SYMPATHY FOR APARTHEID, BUT ITS POLITICAL FOOTWORK ON THE SPORTS ISSUE HAS NOT BEEN ALTOGETHER SURE RECENTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, IT GAVE THE COLD SHOULDER TREATMENT TO ABRAHAM ORDIA, A NIGERIAN HEADING THE SUPREME AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR SPORTS, DURING ORDIA'S RECENT VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND. INVITED TO NEW ZEALAND BY H.A.R.T. (HALT ALL RACISTS TOUR), THE MOST VICIFEROUS NEW ZEALAND BODY OPPOSING SPORTS CONTACTS WITH SOUTH AFRICA, ORDIA WAS FEATURED ON A RAUCOUS TELEVISION SHOW WHERE

PRO AND ANTI RUGBY-WITH-SOUTH AFRICA FANS BECAME  
EXTREMELY EMOTIONAL. INVITED TO SEND A REPRESENTATIVE  
TO TAKE PART IN THE TELEVISION PROGRAM, THE GOVERNMENT  
DECLINED. NEITHER DID ANY GOVERNMENT MINISTERS OR  
OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ASK ORDIA TO CALL ON THEM.  
THE GOVERNMENT'S GENERAL HANDLING OF THE MATTER MAY  
HAVE LEFT ORDIA WITH THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS BEING  
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DELIBERATELY SLIGHTED. IN RETROSPECT, AT LEAST, THE  
GOVERNMENT MIGHT WELL HAVE GIVEN ORDIA IF NOT A RED,  
AT LEAST A PINK, CARPET TREATMENT, RATHER THAN APPEARING  
STUDIOUSLY TO IGNORE HIM. IT MIGHT HAVE EXPLAINED TO  
ORDIA THAT NEW ZEALAND STRONGLY OPPOSES APARTHEID,  
PARTICULARLY AS IT COULD NOT HAVE BEEN UNAWARE THAT  
H.A.R.T. WAS DOING ALL IT COULD TO MISREPRESENT THE  
GOVERNMENT'S TRUE POSITION. BUT INSTEAD, THE GOVERNMENT  
INDULGED IN THE LUXURY OF BEING STIFF NECKED AND LEFT  
THE FIELD TO THE H.A.R.T. EXTREMISTS WHO HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY  
FILLED ORDIA WITH EVERY MISAPPREHENSION ABOUT NEW ZEALAND  
THAT THEY CAN THINK OF.

5. COMMENT. AMATEUR RUGBY IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE  
NEW ZEALAND WAY OF LIFE, AND OPPOSITION TO RUGBY CONTESTS,  
EVEN WITH APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, IS LOOKED UPON BY MANY  
TRADITIONALISTS NEW ZEALANDERS AS SOME SORT OF DISTASTEFUL  
HERESY. THIS IS A CONTINUING ISSUE DIVIDING THE GOVERNMENT  
AND THE OPPOSITION LABOUR PARTY WHICH VIEWS ITSELF AS  
FINELY ATTUNED TO THE NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE THIRD  
WORLD. GIVEN THE LATEST UPROAR, SPORTS CONTACTS WITH  
SOUTH AFRICA WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CONTINUE TO BE A HOT  
POLITICAL ISSUE BETWEEN THE TWO MAIN POLITICAL PARTIES  
IN THIS COUNTRY. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE  
BECAUSE ALTHOUGH NEW ZEALAND HAS BEEN VINDICATED  
TO THE EXTENT THAT IT WILL AFTER ALL BE COMPETING IN  
THE OLYMPIC GAMES, THIS MAY WELL NOT BE THE CASE WHEN  
THE NEXT COMMONWEALTH GAMES ARE STAGED. FOR IF THE  
NON-WHITE COMMONWEALTH MEMBERS THEN REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE  
IF NEW ZEALAND TAKES PART, THIS COUNTRY COULD FIND  
ITSELF EVEN MORE EMBARRASSED THAN IT IS NOW. END  
COMMENT.  
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